

Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI) Review Executive Summary

At the end of 2003, ECU Policy, Planning and Academic Support conducted a review of the UTEI system. The terms of reference included reviewing:

- the UTEI instrument;
- the UTEI policy;
- methods of collecting the UTEI data;
- the UTEI data;
- access to and dissemination of UTEI reports;
- use of the UTEI data.

The review was based mainly on information from a survey of ECU staff and students, and the CSESS study of the UTEI instrument. The Staff Survey was a comprehensive 20-item one that was completed by 65 ECU staff, while the Student Survey was a much briefer 4-item one that was completed by 90 students. To ensure the integrity of the information collected, the University used an independent Consultancy Service to conduct both surveys.

The report of the review (pp. 8-29) first describes the sources of data used in the review, and then for each of the six aspects of the UTEI system:

- summarises the relevant evidence acknowledging all issues and concerns;
- identifies the key issues and evidence supporting the findings; and
- lists the findings.

The number of findings corresponding to each aspect of the UTEI system ranged from two to six, and totalled 21. The following is a summary of the key findings.

The UTEI Instrument: *The University should retain and support the existing UTEI instrument for at least a further three years.*

The UTEI Policy: *The University should not change the UTEI Policy, and therefore not change the existing data collection schedule, before it is due for revision.*

Methods of Collecting the UTEI Data: *The three options offered for paper-based UTEI data collection provide the best balance of flexibility and cost-effectiveness. Schools be encouraged to use the non-standard collection process where class disruption from either of the centrally organised standard collection methods is deemed unacceptable.*

The UTEI Data: *The University should retain the existing structure and layout of the computer-generated UTEI reports.*

Access to and Dissemination of UTEI Reports: *The University and the NTEU need to review and possibly renew the confidentiality agreement restricting access to School and individual UTEI reports.*

Use of UTEI Data: *The UTEI reports are useful and effective for monitoring units and teaching, and for reporting teaching effectiveness.*

An overview of all issues together with the list of findings for each of the six aspects of the UTEI system is reported separately (pp. 2-7).

Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI) Review Overview of Issues and Findings

The following is an overview of the UTEI review, conducted by ECU Policy, Planning and Academic Support at the end of 2003/2. For each of the following aspects of the UTEI system:

- the UTEI instrument;
- the UTEI policy;
- methods of collecting the UTEI data;
- the UTEI data;
- access to and dissemination of UTEI reports;
- use of the UTEI data.

this overview identifies the key issues and evidence supporting the findings, and lists the findings.

The UTEI Instrument

An instrument such as the UTEI has two principle purposes. The first is diagnostic, enabling staff to identify the strengths and weakness in the unit and their teaching. The second is that of monitoring units and their teaching over time, which requires the data remain comparable and hence be generated with the same instrument. Thus the task of this review is to weigh the evidence for a change in the instrument against the evidence for a retention of the existing instrument.

Despite the concerns expressed with existing UTEI items, that almost 60% of staff surveyed agreed that the questions asked and scales generated are suitable is critical evidence supporting the retention of the existing instrument. Retaining the existing instrument will encourage a more effective use of the UTEI data in the foreseeable future, particularly with respect to monitoring units and teaching against a consistent baseline over time. A reasonable time for a review of this decision would be in three years time.

Finding 1.1

As a majority of staff surveyed agreed that the questions asked and scales generated are suitable, the University should retain the existing UTEI. This will enable UTEI data to be used for monitoring units and their teaching against a consistent baseline over a longer time period.

Finding 1.2

Until the next review of the UTEI system, the only changes to the UTEI form be of a minor nature (eg layout) that preserves comparability of the data generated.

Finding 1.3

That the University supports the existing UTEI instrument for at least a further three years and reviews all aspects of the UTEI system at the end of the 2006 academic year.

The UTEI Policy

Two key principles in the UTEI Policy are the following.

1. Schools shall administer the UTEI across the entire unit each time the unit is conducted.
2. The data collected will be used to conduct a regular and systematic School Review of the teaching and learning performance in all units offered by the School in the previous semester.

This policy is due for revision by 12 September 2005.

Administering the UTEI to **all** students in **all** units **each** semester imposes a serious data collection burden on the University and its Schools. The University needs to be assured that the value to individual staff, Schools, Faculties and the University of the UTEI data generated justifies the time and cost of its collection.

As a single academic year's experience with the new UTEI policy is insufficient to review here the effectiveness of School Reviews monitoring and reviewing teaching and learning, this issue is best deferred until the next review of the UTEI system. But the only relevant criterion for assessing alternative data collection schedules is the value of the UTEI data to the School Review process. Accordingly, both issues, the frequency of the UTEI collection schedule and the effectiveness of School Reviews monitoring and reviewing teaching and learning, are best reviewed jointly at the next review of the UTEI system. That a majority of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI should be administered across the entire unit each time the unit is conducted and that the students themselves failed to identify student survey fatigue as one of their concerns supports the continuation of the existing policy with its current data collection schedule.

Finding 2.1

The University should not change the UTEI Policy, and therefore not change the existing data collection schedule, before it is due for revision at the end of the 2006 academic year or such other time as be determined.

Finding 2.2

The only relevant criterion for assessing alternative data collection schedules is the value of the UTEI data, relative to the time and cost of its collection, to the School Review process monitoring and reviewing teaching and learning.

Finding 2.3

That more comprehensive web-based documentation and staff development activities be developed to assist academic staff with implementing UTEI Policy and the School Review process.

Methods of Collecting the UTEI Data

All UTEI data is currently collected using one of three possible options.

1. **Standard Collection:** centrally organised using non-ECU staff during a standard collection fortnight where this is cost effective.
2. **Standard Collections with Preference:** as for 1 but with a date/time preference.
3. **Non-standard Collections:** School/Faculty organised and conducted, where it is inconvenient or impossible for the data to be collected via 1 or 2 above.

The method of collecting the UTEI data must be sufficiently flexible to cover the variety of class schedules used, yet be cost-effective. The validity and reliability of the data is improved when procedures for administering the instrument are standardised. The use of a centrally organised standard collection with non-ECU staff can help to ensure that these standards are met. A key principle in the UTEI Policy is that Schools are responsible for the administration of the UTEI. Thus the centrally organised standard collection is a cost-effective service to Schools, but to be used only where it is appropriate to do so.

An online version of the UTEI is currently under development and scheduled for completion at the end of 2004/1. This will assist with the data collection process, particularly from offshore classes and students studying externally or in fully online mode. Other data collection difficulties are due mainly to a lack of staff awareness of the existing process, eg that Schools can collect the data themselves and the need to comply with data collection standards, rather than the process itself. The UTEI data must be collected in a professional manner with minimal disruption to classes and in accordance with the standards necessary to assure data integrity.

Students need evidence that the UTEI information they provide is valued and used. The best time for informing them of this is during the first or second contact session of the semester. The best way of doing this is the Unit Coordinator, when explaining the unit outline and the unit plan to students, informing students as to how past UTEI data has been used to improve the unit. This is in fact a key principle of the UTEI Policy, which warrants more effective promotion.

Finding 3.1

A centrally organised standard collection process is the most cost-effective form of UTEI data collection.

Finding 3.2

The three options offered for paper-based UTEI data collection provide the best balance of flexibility and cost-effectiveness.

Finding 3.3

Schools be encouraged to use the non-standard collection process where class disruption from either of the centrally organised standard collection methods is deemed unacceptable.

Finding 3.4

That more comprehensive web-based documentation and staff development activities be developed to assist both non-ECU and ECU staff collect the UTEI data in a professional manner, with minimal disruption to classes and in accordance with the standards necessary to assure data integrity.

Finding 3.5

The UTEI Policy requirement that:

- 4.5. Unit co-ordinators will inform students as to how the results of the unit evaluation have been used to improve the unit the next time it runs.

needs to be included in the web-based documentation and staff development activities assisting academic staff implement UTEI Policy.

Finding 3.6

That the University supports the project developing an online version of the UTEI as a useful and necessary alternative to the paper-based form.

The UTEI Data

UTEI data is both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data, in the responses of students to the open-ended questions, contains information useful for diagnosing strengths and weaknesses and providing quotes that can be used in a report to give understanding. However, analysis of student comments is costly and time consuming. Any centralised analysis is feasible only from data collected with the online version of the UTEI. Currently, all envelopes of UTEI forms are returned to the respective Unit Coordinators to conduct this analysis from the completed response sheets and inform relevant staff.

Quantitative data is contained in the computer-generated reports. The UTEI system generates unit, lecturer and tutor reports at the three reporting levels, individual, School and University. That almost 60% of staff surveyed agreed that the reports display the relevant data clearly and succinctly is critical evidence supporting the retention of their existing report structure and layout. Thus the University should retain the form of the existing computer-generated UTEI reports. Where changes have been requested (eg trend data, plots), they are extensions to rather than changes of the existing reports.

Concerns with the data integrity, eg tutor reports being posted for tutors who never tutored the unit or lecturer reports for lecturers who never lectured the unit, are best addressed at the data collection stage. The integrity of the UTEI data must be sufficient for the data to be used with confidence. Where a UTEI report contains an error that can be corrected, the error must be corrected. Thus there needs to be a means of 'cleansing' UTEI data and correcting reports known to be in error.

Finding 4.1

As a majority of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI reports display the relevant data clearly and succinctly, the University should retain the existing structure and layout of the computer-generated UTEI reports.

Finding 4.2

The development of the following features be supported as useful extensions to the UTEI reports:

- 1. automatic display of trend data;*
- 2. relevant graphical plots eg to enable staff see an individual score in relation to the corresponding spread of scores;*

Finding 4.3

The development of a means of 'cleansing' UTEI data and correcting UTEI reports where necessary be supported as an essential part of maintaining the integrity of the UTEI data.

Access and Dissemination of UTEI Reports

The confidentiality agreement between the NTEU (ECU Branch) and the University restricting access to School and individual reports was only for an initial 12-month

period, which has now expired. This agreement needs to be reviewed and possibly renewed.

Although access to all individual and School UTEI reports is restricted and controlled by the individual School, it is expected that all teaching staff, Unit Coordinators and Course Coordinators will receive copies of **all** individual UTEI reports in **all** units in their respective areas of responsibility. Furthermore, staff need to receive all these relevant reports as soon as they are generated in order to conduct the School Review as required by UTEI Policy in a timely manner.

There is a wide range of opinions held by staff on the extent to which the UTEI data on individual units and teachers should remain confidential. Wider dissemination and freer access would reduce delays and ensure that the UTEI reports have a more strategic impact. However, that almost 80% of staff consider that the confidentiality agreement does not need changing, is strong evidence supporting the continuation of the existing agreement.

Finding 5.1

The University and the NTEU (ECU Branch) need to review and possibly renew the confidentiality agreement restricting access to School and individual UTEI reports. The new agreement should be for at least a further three years or until the next review of the UTEI system.

Finding 5.2

All teaching staff, Unit Coordinators and Course Coordinators need to receive copies of all individual UTEI reports in all units in their respective areas of responsibility in order to conduct the School Review as required by the UTEI Policy in a timely manner.

Finding 5.3

With any restriction on access to individual and School UTEI reports, the Head of School is the best person to determine which reports each staff member in the School should receive.

Finding 5.4

That the University supports the project developing an online version of the UTEI, which includes an improved method of disseminating UTEI reports to staff.

Use of UTEI Data

The UTEI data is used in different ways by ECU staff at different levels of responsibility. Individual academic staff need to use UTEI data to:

- identify strengths and weaknesses in their units and teaching, in order to make improvements;
- demonstrate the process and results of such evaluations to their Head of School as part of the Management for Performance process;
- gain longitudinal data of their performance for probation, contract renewal and promotional purposes.

Unit and Course Coordinators, Heads of Schools and Executive Deans of Faculties each need to monitor and evaluate the quality of units and teaching within their respective areas of responsibility for self-review and academic audit purposes.

Almost 75% of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI reports are useful and effective for monitoring units and teaching. Many of the staff concerns with using the UTEI data are due to a lack of familiarity of the data and the requirements of UTEI Policy.

Finding 6.1

A majority of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI reports are useful and effective for monitoring units and teaching, and for reporting teaching effectiveness.

Finding 6.2

That more comprehensive web-based documentation and staff development activities be developed to assist staff using the UTEI data to monitor and review teaching and learning.

Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI) Review Report

Background and Terms of Reference

At its meeting of 12 September 2002, Academic Board endorsed (AB117/02, 12/09/02) the School Review of Units and Teaching Policy¹ supporting the revised and improved unit and teaching evaluation instrument (UTEI). The former instrument had been revised to take into account, amongst other things, different teachers in a unit and large classes. Implementation of the policy in 2002/2 required changes to systems for:

- collecting the feedback data from students;
- processing the student response forms; and
- generating and disseminating the reports.

At the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Committee and prior to endorsing (CTLC27/02, 27/08/02) the School Review of Units and Teaching Policy, members discussed a number of issues concerning its implementation. The minutes (CTLC, 27/08/02, p. 2) recorded:

that there will be the opportunity to review the policy twelve months after implementation.

In accordance with this CTLC requirement, ECU Policy, Planning and Academic Support conducted a UTEI review at the end of 2003/2. The terms of reference were extended to include all aspects of the UTEI system including:

- the UTEI instrument;
- the UTEI policy;
- methods of collecting the UTEI data;
- the UTEI data;
- access to and dissemination of UTEI reports;
- use of the UTEI data.

This report of the review, which can be read independently of supporting references, first describes the sources of data used in the review, and then for each of the six aspects of the UTEI system:

- summarises the relevant evidence acknowledging all issues and concerns;
- identifies the key issues and evidence supporting the findings; and
- lists the findings.

Sources of Data

This review was based on information from the following three main sources of data:

1. a Survey of ECU Staff and Students;
2. the CSESS Study of the UTEI Instrument;

¹ Since re-named the Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI) Policy.

3. the file of emails between ECU teaching staff and the Manager Quality Assurance (T&L Quality).

This report can be read independently of these sources as it liberally incorporates quotations from their reports.

Survey of ECU Staff and Students

Peter Smith Consultancy Services (PSCS) was contracted to conduct a survey on behalf of the University to obtain information from both staff and students about the UTEI system. The Staff Survey was a comprehensive 20-item one while the Student Survey was a much briefer 4-item one. Both surveys used a combination of questions with a forced-choice response format (eg SD, D, N, A & SA) and open-ended questions for further comment.

The purpose of the Staff Survey was to collect information on staff perceptions of all aspects of the UTEI system. Academic staff from all five ECU Faculties were invited to participate on the basis of their role and responsibilities with respect to teaching and learning. Staff selected comprised:

- Senior Faculty Staff - all Executive Deans, A/Deans (T&L);
- all Heads of School;
- University/Faculty CTLC Members - all members of both University and Faculty Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Committees;
- Academic Teaching Staff - a sample of other academic teaching staff purposively selected on the basis of their teaching role (the two staff from each School with the largest total number of respondents to the 2003/1 UTEI Lecturer Evaluation).

The purpose of the Student Survey was to collect information from ECU students on their perceptions concerning:

- the ECU policy of collecting data on each unit and each teacher each semester;
- data collection during class time, eg a lecture;
- further concerns regarding the UTEI system;
- possible improvements to the system.

ECU students were initially randomly approached on campus after the 2003/2 examination period. This sample was supplemented with telephone interviews of students randomly chosen from the total ECU student data-base.

The University used an independent Consultancy Service to conduct the survey to ensure the integrity of the information collected. The completed questionnaires remain confidential with Peter Smith Consultancy Services, who have reported only summary information in the 45-page report²:

PSCS: Peter Smith Consultancy Services, Unit and Teaching Evaluation Survey:
A preliminary report into the use of the UTEI at Edith Cowan University,
December 2003.

CSESS Study of the UTEI Instrument

During October 2003, the Faculty of CSESS conducted student focus groups in all four CSESS Schools to investigate student understanding and interpretation of the questions used in the UTEI instrument. The purpose of the study was to improve both the instrument as well as our understanding of students' perspectives on the

² Copies available from the Manager Quality Assurance (T&L Quality).

instrument and on good teaching. The results of the study are contained in the 16-page report³:

CSESS: Marais, I., ECU Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI) Focus Group Report, Edith Cowan University.

File of Emails

An additional source of information is the file of emails between ECU staff and the Manager Quality Assurance (T&L Quality) concerning the UTEI system, referenced as:

eFILE: file of emails between ECU staff and the Manager Quality Assurance (T&L Quality)

Evidence and Findings on the UTEI Instrument

The UTEI instrument is a standardised questionnaire (ie no choice of items) that provides for:

1. unit evaluation of each unit; and within the unit,
2. lecturer evaluation of each lecturer; and
3. tutor evaluation of each tutor.

Currently, the UTEI is administered in a paper-based form, with students completing the questionnaire during class time.

The Student Survey (PSCS, p. 29) identified the following thematic categories.

Good idea but...

- I think it's important but we are losing time.
- The only reason I agree is if something is done.
- If the results are taken seriously...but nothing seems to change.

Questions

- Too much to read and do.

Format

- Some of the questions repeat themselves... too generic.
- Too many questions and some seem to say the same thing.
- The questions did not relate to our course, they weren't relevant.
- The questions are fine.
- It asks questions about unit objectives but I couldn't remember them when I was completing the form.

General

- It's a good idea to evaluate the content and state avenues for improvement.
- Yes it allows us to have a bitch and say what we think.

Despite the variability in these comments, a large majority of students surveyed (94%) agreed that ECU should be evaluating the teaching that students receive (PSCS, p. 29).

Part A of the CSESS Study supports the categories identified from the Student Survey.

- eager to fill in the form and give feedback about concerns/ideas about the unit; (p. 5)
- too many questions, some of which were very similar and unclear; (p. 4)
- too many questions – never enough time; (p. 4)

³ Copies available from Heather Sparrow, Senior Lecturer-T&L, CSESS.

but identified an additional category, that students in a very good or bad unit are more highly motivated to provide feedback via the UTEI rather than students in a unit perceived as neither very good or very bad.

- When I feel indifferent I don't want to bother but when it was a very good or very bad unit I take care to fill it in and I want to give feedback. (p. 2)

The CSESS Study also reported (CSESS, p. 14) that "Some questions are very similar and some are very ambiguous, leading to quite different interpretations. The students don't analyse the questions very much and some have remarked that they don't read through them. Also, their responses to the multiple-choice questions may be more reliable or carefully thought about when at the extremes than in the middle."

The Staff Survey (PSCS, p. 6) identified the following thematic categories.

Data too general

- ... standardised questions are so generic as to be essentially meaningless.

Unit/Subject specific questions needed

- The information obtained is of limited value for disciplines that vary widely.

Concerns regarding reliability and validity

- The product of the UTEI has not been tested for reliability or validity. It is obvious that small numbers can skew the results.

Philosophical

- These are students opinions and keeping students happy to produce high scores may not be the best for their education. Some areas will give different results. e.g., social studies vs. science, male students vs. female students.

Despite this, almost 70% of staff surveyed agreed with the use of a standardised questionnaire (PSCS, p. 5). Furthermore, almost 60% of staff surveyed agreed that the questions asked and scales generated with the UTEI are suitable (PSCS, p. 6) despite the following.

Ambiguity in questions

- The unit challenged my thinking – What if the unit is difficult. Would you agree that the unit is challenging or strongly disagree because it is rather difficult?

Inappropriate questions

- The questions are biased against science disciplines as it lacks any reference to improving numeracy or practical skills but does ask about communication.
- The questions don't reflect teaching for creativity.

Increase use of qualitative questions

- Some questions that may be specific to a unit are not addressed in the questions. Some questions do not appear to provide a constructive basis for staff to alter and improve their practice.

Too generic

- The problem for lecturers is that the questions are too generic ...

Despite the majority staff agreement with the suitability of the UTEI questions asked and scales generated, almost 70% of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI instrument needs to be changed (PSCS, p. 7) as, for example:

- It does not provide for more independent study like units.
- The current questionnaire makes assumptions about the nature of teaching and the structure of classes. These assumptions are not accurate in the case of the Academy of performing Arts.
- Asking students about 'tutors' is confusing in units with no tutor. Some of the questions in this section relate to 'marking' which is relevant, whether the marking is done by tutors or lecturers but students don't know whether they should answer them or not if they have no tutor.

An instrument such as the UTEI that provides data on units and teaching has two principle purposes. The first is diagnostic, enabling staff teaching a unit to identify the strengths and weakness in the unit and their teaching. The second is to enable staff monitor units and their teaching over time. Now a requirement of data used to monitor units and teaching over time is that the data remain comparable and hence be generated with the same instrument. Thus the task of this review is to weigh the evidence for a change in the instrument against the evidence for a retention of the existing instrument.

Despite the concerns expressed with the UTEI items, that almost 60% of staff surveyed agreed that the questions asked and scales generated are suitable (PSCS, p. 6) is critical evidence supporting the retention of the existing instrument. Retaining the existing instrument will encourage a more effective use of the UTEI data in the foreseeable future, particularly with respect to monitoring units and teaching against a consistent baseline over time. A reasonable time for a review of this decision would be in three years time.

Accordingly, the evidence supports the following findings on the retention of the existing UTEI instrument.

Finding 1.1

As a majority of staff surveyed agreed that the questions asked and scales generated are suitable, the University should retain the existing UTEI. This will enable UTEI data to be used for monitoring units and their teaching against a consistent baseline over a longer time period.

Finding 1.2

Until the next review of the UTEI system, the only changes to the UTEI form be of a minor nature (eg layout) that preserves comparability of the data generated.

Finding 1.3

That the University supports the existing UTEI instrument for at least a further three years and reviews all aspects of the UTEI system at the end of the 2006 academic year.

Specific suggestions (see eFILE) for modifications to the existing UTEI form that preserve the comparability of the data generated include:

- relabel Campus ES (External Studies) as NP (National Program) to cover all off-campus on-shore offerings;
- swap the order of Tutor Evaluation and Lecturer Evaluation on both types of UTEI form to order the three components as Unit Evaluation, then Lecturer Evaluation and finally Tutor Evaluation.

These modifications are planned for the next printing of the UTEI form to be used in 2004/2.

Evidence and Findings on the UTEI Policy

Two key principles in the UTEI Policy are the following.

1. Schools shall administer the UTEI across the entire unit each time the unit is conducted.

2. The data collected will be used to conduct a regular and systematic School Review of the teaching and learning performance in all units offered by the School in the previous semester.

This policy is due for revision by 12 September 2005.

With respect to the mandatory use of the UTEI, the Staff Survey (PSCS, p. 23) identified the following thematic categories.

Over-evaluated students

- Administering should be regular but not necessarily each semester the unit runs...should be left to the school decision in what time interval.
- This is not necessary or desirable, needs to be on a rolling timetable.
- It is too frequent, the students do not take good care as they are being evaluated out.
- Causes over evaluation factor - students fed up with filling in forms twice a semester for each unit.

Over-evaluated staff

- If you are assessing every unit each semester how is there time to make improvements. We seem to go from assessment to assessment.
- Just like it is possible to have too much assessment of students, it is also possible to have too much assessment of staff. However, I would be prepared to alter my response to 'SA' if ALL staff from the VC and down to the Deans agree to subject themselves to appraisals by staff each semester.

Adequate

- Happy with this
- I regard the UTEI as essential, so much so that it must be done well. The data must be quality data, and it must be usable data. It is equally essential that students be acculturated to its administration so that they do not resent its application in every unit.

The majority of staff surveyed (52%) agreed that the UTEI should be administered across the entire unit each time the unit is conducted (PSCS, p. 23). Despite the student survey fatigue reported by staff, the students themselves failed to identify this issue as one of their concerns with the UTEI system (PSCS, p. 29). The mandatory use of the UTEI and other matters of UTEI policy were not directly addressed in the CSESS Study.

With respect to the School Review, the Staff Survey (PSCS, p. 24) identified the following thematic categories.

Limitations of using UTEI in reviews

- I am concerned about this, not because of the results per se, but because the instrument is not 100% valid and reliable in its current form.
- But under the current system it does not and cannot happen. It lies solely with the Head of School as he/she cannot make scores public to other members of staff. This cannot be a valid review, the HoS is not expert in all the School's disciplines but is prohibited from discussing areas of strength and weakness with course or unit co-ordinators. Even if the HoS did determine action was needed how could it be taken without the reasons for it being divulged?
- This point of the policy conflicts directly with the confidentiality requirements.
- So long as people recognise it is a very gross tool.

General

- It may be that the school chooses to administer UTEIs each semester that unit runs but the detailed review does not have to be conducted every semester, assuming that monitoring for the results deviating too much from the average is continuous.

Regular and systematic review is the principle means of maintaining quality in teaching and learning, as specified in the ECU Quality in Teaching and Learning Framework⁴.

Principle T1. Teaching Quality

2. University teachers will regularly monitor and evaluate their teaching quality to continuously improve upon their performance. This involves
 - collecting and interpreting relevant data from a variety of sources; and
 - reflecting critically on this information to identify strengths and weaknesses.

Administering the UTEI to **all** students in **all** units **each** semester however, imposes a serious data collection burden on the University and its Schools. The University needs to be assured that the value to individual staff, Schools, Faculties and the University of the UTEI data generated justifies the time and cost of its collection. Policies supporting both former evaluation systems (UEI, 1995/1 to 2000/2; UEI/TEI, 2000/2 to 2002/1) merely specified that:

The instruments will be administered as often as is necessary but at least every three years to meet University, Faculty and School requirements ...

The issue then is whether UTEI data collected less frequently would be sufficient to meet UTEI Policy objectives. Alternatives for regular but less frequent evaluation include administering the UTEI to:

1. **all** students in **all** units alternately semester one and semester two each year;
2. **all** students in **half** the units each semester (ie each unit evaluated on alternate offerings);
3. **all** students in units each semester as specified by the Head of School;
4. **a selected sample** of students in **all** units each semester.

Of these, alternative four is the least likely to be effective. The low response rate with a sample of students, from factors expressed (PSCS, p. 30) as:

- If you sent it to my home it wouldn't get done.
- Any other time and we wouldn't do it.

is an unacceptable risk to the validity of the data subsequently collected. The efficacy of each of the remaining three collection schedules however, is less clear. The task then is to weigh the evidence for a policy change now, using an untested alternative collection schedule, against the evidence for a continuation of the existing policy with the current schedule (**all** students in **all** units **each** semester). In weighing the evidence, the only relevant criterion is the value of the UTEI data meeting policy objectives relative to the time and cost of its collection.

The UTEI Policy objective is that:

A single, machine-readable Unit and Teaching Evaluation (UEI/TEI) instrument shall be used

for the following.

- 2.3 The purpose of student evaluations of units and teaching is to review the effectiveness of the environment for teaching and learning in the University.
- 2.4 The purpose of obtaining student feedback for the evaluation of units and teaching is to provide a source of information about units and their teaching (based on student perceptions of their experiences) to guide the developmental process.

Furthermore,

- 2.1 This policy is to be viewed as part of the University's continuing commitment to the development of appropriate policies and practices that promote improvement

⁴ Available from the website: <http://www.ecu.edu.au/GPPS/policy/>

in teaching and learning. The emphasis of the policy is on self-evaluation and improvement by the School.

- 4.3 The data collected will be used to conduct a regular and systematic review of the teaching and learning performance in all units offered by the School in the previous semester.
- 4.4 The Executive Dean/Dean/Director of WAAPA@ECU/Head of School shall use the data for the following purposes:
 - a. to improve the quality of teaching and learning in all units under their control;
 - b. to improve the performance of individual staff in the School in relation to the quality of teaching and learning; and
 - c. to inform the assessment of academic staff ...

As policy emphasis is on using the UTEI data for School Reviews monitoring and reviewing teaching and learning, the value of the UTEI data generated is best judged by the effectiveness of these processes. As a single academic year's experience with the new UTEI policy is insufficient to review the effectiveness of School Reviews here, this issue is best deferred until the next review of the UTEI system. But the only relevant criterion for assessing alternative data collection schedules is the value of the UTEI data to the School Review process. Accordingly, both issues, the frequency of the UTEI collection schedule and the effectiveness of School Reviews monitoring and reviewing teaching and learning, are best reviewed jointly at the next review of the UTEI system.

The following two pieces of evidence from the Staff and Student Surveys support the continuation of the existing policy with its current frequency schedule (**all** students in **all** units **each** semester).

- The majority of staff surveyed (52%) agreed that the UTEI should be administered across the entire unit each time the unit is conducted (PSCS, p. 23).
- The students themselves failed to identify student survey fatigue as one of their concerns with the UTEI system (PSCS, p. 29).

Elaborating on the first statistic, only 32% of staff surveyed (PSCS, p. 23) **disagreed** that the UTEI should be administered across the entire unit each time the unit is conducted. However, more effective staff support is needed with implementing UTEI Policy, particularly with respect to the School Review process.

Accordingly, the evidence supports the following findings on the UTEI Policy.

Finding 2.1

The University should not change the UTEI Policy, and therefore not change the existing data collection schedule, before it is due for revision at the end of the 2006 academic year or such other time as be determined.

Finding 2.2

The only relevant criterion for assessing alternative data collection schedules is the value of the UTEI data, relative to the time and cost of its collection, to the School Review process monitoring and reviewing teaching and learning.

Finding 2.3

That more comprehensive web-based documentation and staff development activities be developed to assist academic staff with implementing UTEI Policy and the School Review process.

Evidence and Findings on the Methods of Collecting the UTEI Data

All UTEI data is currently collected using one of three possible options.

1. **Standard Collection:** centrally organised using non-ECU staff during a standard collection fortnight where this is cost effective.
2. **Standard Collections with Preference:** as for 1 but with a date/time preference.
3. **Non-standard Collections:** School/Faculty organised and conducted where it is inconvenient or impossible for the data to be collected via 1 or 2 above.

With respect to the standard collection process using non-ECU staff, the Staff Survey (PSCS, p. 8) identified the following thematic categories.

Improving

- I strongly support this, it has also been getting progressively more efficient and professional. Still takes too long in class situation though.
- Good range of options - thanks. Some staff not clear, but should improve as we get used to the process.

Timing

- Is very disruptive to a class when the collection person arrives halfway through a session.
- No lecturer wants their lecture 'taken over' unexpectedly and, possibly at a very inconvenient time.

Who completes the evaluation

- Students who are missed by interviewers to be identified and then given the opportunity for submission on a later date.

Use of external collectors: Good aspects

- Provides for a more valid and reliable test.
- This process is fine if it conducted courteously and non-intrusively.

Use of external collectors: Less good aspects

- The costs outweigh the advantages here I think. Previously we had a workable and efficient system in place where a staff member NOT involved with the unit distributed the evaluations while the lecturer left the room. I saw no reason to change this.
- I believe that internal admin staff could be trained to undertake the task more effectively and cost effectively.

Almost 65% of staff surveyed agreed to the use of a standard collection process utilising non-ECU staff (PSCS, p. 8). Furthermore, almost 50% of staff surveyed agreed that the existing method of collecting UTEI data is as effective as possible, given the current restraints (PSCS, p. 9).

- It is clear that the restraints make this whole procedure a difficult one.
- This means we need to find ways of collecting data from everyone, we need to improve the collection processes, we need to ensure the students engage with the data appropriately.

Despite almost 50% of staff surveyed agreeing that the existing method of collecting UTEI data is as effective as possible, almost 80% of staff surveyed agreed that the ECU data collection method needs to be improved (PSCS, p. 10) as, for example:

Improve training to collectors

- Train the data collectors better.
- Ensure the administrators check the surveys to ensure less missing data.
- Provide information for students on how the evaluations are used.

Timing

- I would like notice of when to expect the interruption to my class.
- Use of standard collections with preference available.
- Only use the top and tail of the lecture.

More flexibility in collection

- More flexibility for small and fragmented classes.
- External, online and off-shore students often do not get surveyed.

Increase catchment

- We could reinvest some of the money in alternative evaluation strategies (e.g., focus groups) that provide better qualitative data.

What part of the semester

- Survey during week 12 only captures tolerant students - weak lecturers lose many students from their classes sometimes from week 3 onwards. ... Surveys should be done mid-semester where it really counts.

Do in-house

- Allow for School data collection.

Increase technology

- We should be using technology to collect data more efficiently (ECUWES, ECLIPSE).
- Cater for on-line, distance based students.

Evaluate less

- I'm not convinced that every unit needs this formal approach every semester.
- We could stratify students so they only do evaluations 2/3 times across the 4 years.
- Reduce sampling to 'on demand' at least once every two years.

Improve systems

- There are clear problems with either the collection or the collation of data such that the results do not match up with the actual units delivered. There is no simple solution to this other than greater diligence in organisation, but something must be done for the instrument to have any validity.

With respect to the way the standard collection is currently done (eg, during lectures) the Student Survey (PSCS, p. 30) identified the following thematic categories.

Time

- Limited time to complete.
- I really wanted to answer properly but ran out of time.

Alternatives

- If you sent it to my home it wouldn't get done.
- Any other time and we wouldn't do it.
- Although I don't like it I cant think of a better way.
- On-line.

Less good

- It interrupts the lecture...let the lecturer know and do it at the end of the session or tutorial time.
- It takes up 20 minutes and is slow...they drag on.

General

- Students are lazy so get them while they can't escape.
- Wouldn't get them (the students) to do it any other time.
- Prefer class time it only takes 10 minutes.

The CSESS Study (CSESS p. 14) supported the above-expressed student concerns with the data collection process as follows.

- "The timing of the survey is of concern. It is often an 'interruption' at a time when exam questions are discussed or it happens in the middle of a lecture.
- There is no 'introduction' or 'setting of the stage', giving students some background and implications of the results for staff.
- Students feel rushed but the time pressure seems to come from fellow students and not the evaluator. The lecturer's attitude is also important.
- Students see the UTEI process as necessary and generally want to have their say. This is especially true when it is a very good or very bad unit.
- Students need to see evidence that the process works, i.e. that filling in a UTEI makes a difference. Some have seen such evidence and have developed trust in the process.

- There was no clear difference between how the UTEI is filled out in first year compared to subsequent years."

The majority of students surveyed (58%) in the Student Survey agreed that the way the UTEI is currently conducted (eg, during lectures) is best for them as students (PSCS, p. 30). However, a concern they identified is the lack of evidence that the UTEI information is valued and makes a difference (PSCS, p. 31).

Feedback

- We are told it is important but rarely see effects... Maybe changes happen behind the scenes. If we don't see them the process seems a waste of time.

What is done

- Does anyone pay attention to what we write
- Does the feedback we give matter... we gave feedback in the previous semester but nothing has happened.

The method of collecting the UTEI data must be sufficiently flexible to cover the variety of class schedules used yet be cost-effective. Variability in how the UTEI is administered can affect the quality of the data collected. The validity and reliability of the data is improved when procedures for administering the instrument are standardised. The use of a centrally organised standard collection with non-ECU staff can help to ensure that these standards are met. A key principal in the UTEI Policy is that Schools are responsible for the administration of the UTEI. Thus the centrally organised standard collection is a cost-effective service to Schools, but to be used only where it is appropriate to do so.

Despite improvements with the UTEI data collection, there are still difficulties with:

- obtaining the accurate information needed to administer the standard collection (eg correct names of all lecturers and tutors teaching each unit);
- sufficient School staff awareness enabling all data to be collected in each unit by the most appropriate means;
- collecting the UTEI data with minimal disruption to classes;
- collecting data from offshore classes and external students.

An online version of the UTEI is currently under development and scheduled for completion at the end of 2004/1. This will assist with the data collection process, particularly from offshore classes and students studying externally or in fully online mode.

The other difficulties are due mainly to a lack of staff awareness of the existing process, eg that Schools can collect the data themselves and the need to comply with data collection standards, rather than the process itself. The UTEI data must be collected in a professional manner with minimal disruption to classes and in accordance with the standards necessary to assure data integrity. The Evaluation Officer's Manual⁵ instructs staff as follows with respect to their arrival at a classroom.

Be courteous and professional at all times. Remember that you are a guest in the staff member's classroom. (p. 3)

Students need evidence that the UTEI information they provide is valued and used. The best time for this is in class, during the first or second contact session of the semester. The best way of doing this is the Unit Coordinator, when explaining the unit outline and the unit plan to students, informing students as to how past UTEI data

⁵ Available from the Manager Quality Assurance (T&L Quality).

has been used to improve the unit. This is in fact a requirement of UTEI Policy, which states:

4.5. Unit co-ordinators will inform students as to how the results of the unit evaluation have been used to improve the unit the next time it runs.

This key principle of the UTEI Policy warrants more effective promotion.

Accordingly, the evidence supports the following findings on the methods of collecting the UTEI data.

Finding 3.1

A centrally organised standard collection process is the most cost-effective form of UTEI data collection.

Finding 3.2

The three options offered for paper-based UTEI data collection provide the best balance of flexibility and cost-effectiveness.

Finding 3.3

Schools be encouraged to use the non-standard collection process where class disruption from either of the centrally organised standard collection methods is deemed unacceptable.

Finding 3.4

That more comprehensive web-based documentation and staff development activities be developed to assist both non-ECU and ECU staff collect the UTEI data in a professional manner, with minimal disruption to classes and in accordance with the standards necessary to assure data integrity.

Finding 3.5

The UTEI Policy requirement that:

4.5. Unit co-ordinators will inform students as to how the results of the unit evaluation have been used to improve the unit the next time it runs.

needs to be included in the web-based documentation and staff development activities assisting academic staff implement UTEI Policy.

Finding 3.6

That the University supports the project developing an online version of the UTEI as a useful and necessary alternative to the paper-based form.

Evidence and Findings on the UTEI Data

The UTEI data is both:

- quantitative - in the computer-generated reports, and
- qualitative - in the information contained in the student responses to the open-ended questions.

With respect to the qualitative data, the Staff Survey (PSCS, p. 12) identified the following thematic categories.

Very valuable

- These are THE MOST IMPORTANT but need to be transcribed for us, if we ask for this we should get it turned into electronic format. I know it would be expensive but I think it is in some ways more important.
- They are actually more useful than the quantitative data.

Stress importance

- Collectors should stress the importance of student comments.

Damaging nature of comments

- As coordinator of a unit I have seen comments about tutors that are hurtful and not productive.

Never seen

- I have never seen student comments for the units I coordinate.
- These have not been made available to lecturers/tutors.

Alter presentation of qualitative comments

- The collating of comments would be more helpful than the current system that requires lecturers to go to the original forms.
- Please find a way to get them to us digitally to help us analyse them.

Value of qualitative comments

- Collected but not used...Why?
- I find the student comments the most valuable of all.

Less Value

- Often they are too generic to be of much utility.
- Students do not provide enough comments to clarify the nature of problems.

Approximately 75% of staff surveyed agreed that student comments are useful for identifying the strengths and weaknesses in their units and teaching (PSCS, p. 12).

With respect to the quantitative data in the computer-generated reports, almost 60% of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI reports display the relevant data clearly and succinctly (PSCS, p. 13). The following thematic categories were also identified.

• **Additional information needed**

Course data is needed as well – it could well be that students in some courses are disadvantaged where they compete in units with students from other courses.
Would like trend data to display automatically.
Some confusion here, the reports I have received give Individual, School and Faculty but not University.

• **Difficulty understanding**

I can understand it but many of the staff seem to have problems.
Initially, it is hard to get your head around the -100 to 100 scale.
The data from old system was much clearer.
I can rarely work out what the quantitative data is trying to tell me.
Needs better explanation of what the numbers mean.

• **Why only quantitative**

Only displays the quantitative data. The other would be more useful.
Have the comments available on the web version.

With respect to the integrity of the quantitative UTEI data, almost 50% of staff surveyed considered the integrity of the UTEI data to be insufficient to be used with confidence (PSCS, p. 14), for the following reported reasons.

Improving

- It started off hopeless but the newer iterations are getting better. The main issue seems to be mapping staff to units, but this is getting cleaner.

Compromises to integrity

- The lecturers who come last are likely to do much worse cos the students are tired of filling in forms.
- Many variables impact on the data, timing within the semester, timing of this unit review in a context where students have completed reviews for 3 other units.

- There is too much inaccurate data (tutors who never tutored in that unit or lecturers who never lectured in that unit) to make it very valid document.
- Low response rate is problematic for some units.
- For this information to be used with total confidence there needs to be a clear indication the student has read and understood unit outlines, has attended regularly and can be defined within agreed parameters of acceptable studentship.
- I have no information on the integrity of the data. That is another of my concerns. There are no error variances currently reported, and that is poor.
- Anonymity of the student and release and implied accountability of results do not go together.

Purpose of data comparison

- Used for what? Certainly not to compare the performance of lecturers schools or faculties when the results are all similar. Is a score of 65 really better than one of 35?
- I have serious concerns about using fine-scale comparisons between schools to redistribute funding. (This is not to say that negative scores should not be of concern). If the purpose is to reflect the quality of the learning environment provided, it may do that for the negative and positive extremes. I am far less confident about the general “middle”.

Despite almost 60% of staff agreeing that the UTEI reports display the relevant data clearly and succinctly, the majority of staff surveyed (66%) consider some aspects of the UTEI reports need to be changed (PSCS, p. 15), for the following reasons.

Include qualitative information

- Additional use of qualitative methodology.
- Maybe a method of collating the qualitative comments – a challenge!! – but these seem to be ignored.

Presentation

- Explanations to accompany reports.
- Rather than an individual report for each unit could it be presented in spreadsheet form.
- Definitely need a scatter plot (or similar) so that staff can see their scores in relation to the spread of scores in the population.
- Use graphical forms of representation.
- Make available dynamically on the web via COGNOS.

Who receives

- As individuals are being assessed, each individual should receive a report. This is extremely relevant to sessional staff in order to support claims for future postings.
- Ensure results reach lecturers.

UTEI data is both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data, in the responses of students to the open-ended questions, contains information useful for diagnosing strengths and weaknesses and providing quotes that can be used in a report to give understanding. However, analysis of student comments is costly and time consuming. Any centralised analysis is feasible only from data collected with the online version of the UTEI. Currently, all envelopes of UTEI forms are returned to the respective Unit Coordinators to conduct this analysis from the completed response sheets and inform relevant staff.

UTEI quantitative data is contained in the computer-generated reports. The UTEI system generates unit, lecturer and tutor reports at the three reporting levels, individual, School and University. Thus there are:

- Individual Evaluation Reports - for the staff teaching the unit;
- School Evaluation Reports - for Heads of School;
- University Evaluation Reports - for senior University staff and the University community;

each displaying relevant numeric data in one or more tables.

Despite the concerns expressed with the computer-generated UTEI reports, that almost 60% of staff surveyed agreed that the reports display the relevant data clearly and succinctly is critical evidence supporting the retention of their existing structure and layout. Thus the University should retain the form of the existing computer-generated UTEI reports. Where changes have been requested (eg trend data, plots), they are extensions to rather than changes of the existing reports.

Concerns with the data integrity, eg tutor reports being posted for tutors who never tutored the unit or lecturer reports for lecturers who never lectured the unit, are best addressed at the data collection stage. The centrally organised standard collection process requires that Schools submit accurate information on all units, including the correct names of all lecturers and tutors teaching each unit. Furthermore, staff have every right to be concerned about UTEI reports that are known to be in error remaining on the website. The integrity of the UTEI data must be sufficient for the data to be used with confidence. Where a UTEI report contains an error that can be corrected, the error must be corrected. Thus there needs to be a means of 'cleansing' UTEI data and correcting reports known to be in error.

The evidence supports the following findings on the UTEI data.

Finding 4.1

As a majority of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI reports display the relevant data clearly and succinctly, the University should retain the existing structure and layout of the computer-generated UTEI reports.

Finding 4.2

The development of the following features be supported as useful extensions to the UTEI reports:

- 1. automatic display of trend data;*
- 2. relevant graphical plots eg to enable staff see an individual score in relation to the corresponding spread of scores.*

Finding 4.3

The development of a means of 'cleansing' UTEI data and correcting UTEI reports where necessary be supported as an essential part of maintaining the integrity of the UTEI data.

Evidence and Findings on Access to and Dissemination of UTEI Reports

All UTEI reports are posted and available⁶ as html files. The University reports are freely available, along with a guide to the interpretation of the results contained in the reports. All reports for a School are password-protected and disseminated to staff as directed by the Head of School.

With respect to the confidentiality agreement restricting access to School and individual reports, the Staff Survey (PSCS, p. 16) identified the following thematic categories.

Open to all

⁶ Available from the website: <http://www.ecu.edu.au/IRS/utei/>

- Reports should be available to all. There is no need to have confidentiality in this.
- We don't keep RAI scores secret, why should UTEI scores be different?
- Our School has two strong factions, one favouring dissemination within the School the other rigidly opposed. We're told dissemination can only happen with unanimous agreement – this we will never get.

Restrict

- The aggregated data should not be available on either the internet OR the intranet.
- The individual results should only be made available to the HoS and the individual. They should not be accessible to anyone else in the school.
- As an individual, I would be more comfortable if it clearly and unambiguously stated that individual unit data can only be sighted and held by the HOS and the respective individual, and can only be sighted (not held) by the program coordinator for the sole purpose of producing program reports.

Timing

- Results should be made available to staff before or at the same time as heads of school etc – not *after*.

General

- I don't know whether a modified confidentiality agreement might lead to – in some cases – a more considerate response.
- Unit results could be freely accessible to staff with school password while teaching results could remain confidential.
- There is quite a lot of confusion about the interpretation of confidential management of data, we need to have a wider discussion about the ways it is being done.

Almost 80% of staff surveyed consider that the confidentiality agreement does not need changing (PSCS, p. 16). The majority of staff (55%) considered that UTEI reports in their school were disseminated to staff quickly and efficiently (PSCS, p. 18).

Delays

- Efficiently yes as far as the system allows but quickly no. Major problem in large school is just the volume of reports to distribute in a situation where not all staff can be given access due to school decision on confidentiality.
- Not disseminated at all until I went chasing them.

Sessional staff/tutors

- It was hard to get UTEI info on tutors in my units.
- I am less confident about sessional staff reports, as I delegated this duty to course coordinators.

More user friendly

- Staff were confused about the figures which had to be changed to a more readable version by a staff member. Some aspects were missing. Staff had to 'hunt' for the originals.
- It took ages and the reports are not in a convenient format.

Access

- Efficiently yes as far as the system allows but quickly no. Major problem in large school is just the volume of reports to distribute.

Improving

- It was very problematic to begin with, there are signs of improvement. We really need the data in time to respond before the next run of the unit. This is a dilemma as policy says it can't be released until after exam board.

Despite the majority of staff agreeing that UTEI reports in their school were disseminated quickly and efficiently, the majority of staff (53%) agreed that the UTEI report dissemination process needs to be changed (PSCS, p. 19), as follows.

Open Access

- Wider dissemination and freer access would assist staff in benchmarking their performance against others, would assist course co-ordinators in identifying strong/weak units in the course etc.

Timing

- Faster to enable changes to be made to units
- Need to arrive sooner.

Format

- Not all in separate files but in one and programme coordinators need access to the whole programme.
- I would prefer hard copies as well as electronic.

General

- Individual reports and unit summaries to each member of teaching team.
- The hard copies with student comments do not consistently reach the unit coordinator...this needs to be rectified.

The confidentiality agreement between the NTEU (ECU Branch) and the University, states that:

- Neither individual staff member survey results nor the individual unit survey results will be published on the Internet or Intranet. However, the individual results may be made available within the relevant School and/or Program.
- Aggregated (by School and/or Program) teaching and unit data may be published on the Intranet but not the Internet.

This agreement, essentially that of the former UEI and UEI/TEI systems, replaced the open-access statement in the UTEI Policy, namely:

4.6 Data will be publicly available on the University web-site in order that it may be accessed for monitoring improvements and course planning.

However the confidentiality agreement was only for an initial 12-month period, which has now expired. Thus the confidentiality agreement between the NTEU and the University needs to be reviewed and possibly renewed.

As access to all individual and School UTEI reports is restricted and controlled by the individual School, a Head of School may choose to make these reports freely available to all staff within the School, or to control their access more tightly. However, it is expected that all teaching staff, Unit Coordinators and Course Coordinators will receive copies of **all** individual UTEI reports in **all** units in their respective areas of responsibility. Furthermore, staff need to receive all these relevant reports as soon as they are generated in order to conduct the School Review as required by the UTEI Policy in a timely manner.

There is a wide range of opinions held by staff on the extent to which the UTEI data on individual units and teachers should remain confidential. Wider dissemination and freer access would reduce delays and ensure that the UTEI reports have a more strategic impact. However, that almost 80% of staff consider that the confidentiality agreement does not need changing, is strong evidence supporting the continuation of the existing agreement.

Some staff in schools, particularly those seeking promotion, have reported delays with receiving all relevant UTEI reports. There is a need for a more effective dissemination system, such as one permitting individual teaching staff to access their own UTEI reports electronically. The project developing an online version of the UTEI is also examining how best to disseminate UTEI reports online to staff, including a system that permits individual staff access.

The evidence supports the following findings on access and dissemination of the UTEI reports.

Finding 5.1

The University and the NTEU (ECU Branch) need to review and possibly renew the confidentiality agreement restricting access to School and individual UTEI reports. The new agreement should be for at least a further three years or until the next review of the UTEI system.

Finding 5.2

All teaching staff, Unit Coordinators and Course Coordinators need to receive copies of all individual UTEI reports in all units in their respective areas of responsibility in order to conduct the School Review as required by the UTEI Policy in a timely manner.

Finding 5.3

With any restriction on access to individual and School UTEI reports, the Head of School is the best person to determine which reports each staff member in the School should receive.

Finding 5.4

That the University supports the project developing an online version of the UTEI, which includes an improved method of disseminating UTEI reports to staff.

Evidence and Findings on the Use of UTEI Data

Academic staff are expected to use UTEI data:

- to identify strengths and weaknesses in units and teaching;
- to report to the Head of School as part of M4P;
- for probation, contract renewal and promotional purposes.

With respect to the usefulness and effectiveness of the UTEI reports for monitoring units and teaching, the Staff Survey (PSCS, p. 20) identified the following thematic categories.

Acknowledge limitations

- Must not be used alone.
- UTEI is overemphasised as the method for monitoring teaching and learning. Insufficient support is given to peer evaluation.
- There are MANY things that can affect UTEI beyond lecturer performance.
- I agree with the initial statement insofar as these documents are used for staff validation (promotions, contracts).
- They do not give enough detail for one to change teaching.

Purpose

- I can see the need for the university to have some institutional 'feel' for student satisfaction with their courses and their learning environments. Perhaps that should be the primary purpose of a UTEI and the questions should be directed towards this. A danger is that we might be seen to have taken the responsibility for evaluating our learning environments away from staff and to have given it to the university. If so, then this is not a desirable thing. We could do both!

Proceed with caution

- We could find the integrity of data becomes a problem where the consequences are applied inappropriately. We need to conduct serious on-going research into the application of the instrument to provide evidence of its functioning and outcomes.

Useful

- On the whole, however, it provides useful information that appears to be consistent with other sources of evidence of quality of staff teaching.

Lack of knowledge

- I have read the comments on the forms – they are usually helpful. I don't know what the quantitative data means so I cannot really use it. ... Usually I do my own unit evaluations using qualitative means, as this provides more direction for improving my practice.

Almost 75% of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI reports are useful and effective for monitoring units and teaching (PSCS, p. 20). In addition, the majority of staff (54%) surveyed agreed that the UTEI reports are useful and effective for reporting teaching effectiveness (eg M4P, promotion) (PSCS, p. 20), despite the following themes.

Over dependence

- It is a bit scary that so much can ride on a single data collection that can be so dependent on situational factors.
- Only when used in conjunction with other information.
- Potentially useful, particularly for finding broad patterns, and identifying situations that need further investigation.
- Its use in distributing funding is a real concern.

Ambivalence

- They are used in default of any other acceptable source of data. That does not mean that they are useful
- In the absence of anything else this is better than nothing.

Constraints

- The UTEIs are useful for ranking, but I don't believe they really inform about quality.
- Bias against large numbered units and does not allow validation against peer, expert or supervisory review.
- They don't measure teaching effectiveness.
- The UTEIs are useful for ranking, but I don't believe they really inform about quality. They are open to misinterpretation and too easily open to abuse by the staff member who plays the 'popularity' card.
- Reasonable but not necessarily useful for applications outside the university – may be confusing to follow.

The Staff Survey (PSCS, p. 22) identified the following ways of improving the usefulness of the UTEI reports.

Confidentiality

- Find a way to separate tutor and lecturer comments to allow more timely feedback to individual staff and to avoid problems with staff seeing each other's feedback. I realise this may not be feasible.

Under-emphasised

- Good teaching needs to be valued in the university as much as research. e.g., I get very good UTEI scores but this does not seem to be valued when applying for contracts/promotions etc.

Increase qualitative

- Focus more on open ended questions and find a way to digitise these for us.
- Comments from students made available.

General

- Management can be trained to realise that they are not just measuring lecturer performance because that is what they seem to think at the moment.
- Improve dissemination process.
- By ensuring the integrity of the data, and making sure that all classes are covered.
- By making it easier for staff to benchmark their performance. Ideally, for example, a unit co-ordinator of a first year unit should be able to benchmark her teaching and her unit against all other first year units in the Faculty, similarly within majors etc.
- Reducing the dirty data.

The UTEI data is used in different ways by ECU staff at different levels of responsibility. Individual academic staff need to use UTEI data to:

- identify strengths and weaknesses in their units and teaching, in order to make improvements;
- demonstrate the process and results of such evaluations to their Head of School as part of the Management for Performance process;
- gain longitudinal data of their performance for probation, contract renewal and promotional purposes.

Unit and Course Coordinators, Heads of Schools and Executive Deans of Faculties need to monitor and evaluate the quality of units and teaching within their respective areas of responsibility. These staff need to use UTEI data to:

- demonstrate the process and results of such evaluations to their Line Managers as part of the M4P process;
- assure the quality of teaching and learning for self-review and academic audit purposes, particularly for Faculty Annual Reviews and Area of Scholarship Reviews.

Almost 75% of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI reports are useful and effective for monitoring units and teaching. Many of the staff concerns with using the UTEI data are due to a lack of familiarity of the data and the requirements of UTEI Policy. This issue can best be addressed with more effective support assisting staff use the UTEI data to monitor and review teaching and learning.

The evidence supports the following findings on the use of UTEI data.

Finding 6.1

A majority of staff surveyed agreed that the UTEI reports are useful and effective for monitoring units and teaching, and for reporting teaching effectiveness.

Finding 6.2

That more comprehensive web-based documentation and staff development activities be developed to assist staff using the UTEI data to monitor and review teaching and learning.

Further Student Concerns

Only a minority of students surveyed (36%) stated that they have any concerns with the UTEI system. Of all concerns identified (PSCS, p. 31), only two have not previously been discussed. They are handwriting recognition and timing, expressed as follows.

Handwriting

- I am worried about them recognizing my handwriting...teachers are contacts for future work and not just teachers. If they recognize my handwriting my relationship with them may be in jeopardy.
- They may recognise my handwriting and I might have them again next semester.
- I didn't know they see what we write.

When it is done

- It is done before the exams but the exams may change my view of the unit.

Although a large proportion of students were ambivalent, the majority of students surveyed (46%) considered that the UTEI system should be changed (PSCS p. 32) as follows.

Improve

- Just have comments without the rating system
- Provide another avenue for additional comments at another site e.g., website
- It would be better on-line but I wouldn't do it.
- Simplify.
- Explain it in more detail to first years.
- Whatever way you did it, it would be inconvenient.

Each of these student suggestions for improvement corresponds to a particular aspect of the UTEI system that has been addressed earlier in this report. With respect to timing, the use of the standard collection fortnight for all centrally organised collections helps maintain the validity and reliability of the UTEI data. While it can be expected that a student's perception of a unit may be modified by the examination and the final assessment, any collection process later than the standard collection fortnight is not feasible.

Current practice is for students to respond anonymously to the UTEI form. Students need to be confident that that no information identifying them will be provided to staff if they are to provide an honest evaluation of the unit and its teaching. However, the current practice of returning UTEI forms to respective Unit Coordinators to conduct the analysis of the data in the responses of students to the open-ended questions risks a compromise to the principle of anonymity. A Unit Coordinator may recognise a student's handwriting. However, the information contained in the responses of students to the open-ended questions is sufficiently valuable to accept this as a managed risk. This risk is currently managed by returning the completed UTEI forms to Schools as soon as possible but after student marks have been submitted to Student Services.

Evidence on the Most Important Changes Required

To identify a priority list of UTEI features for immediate attention, the Staff Survey asked staff to nominate the most important aspects of the UTEI system that require changing. The staff identified all six aspects of the UTEI system (PSCS, p. 25 - 27) for attention as follows, but raised no new issues from those reviewed previously.

The UTEI Instrument

Questions

- Make the questions clearer... Some items are ambiguous
- Change some of the questions and allow choice

See evidence and findings 1.1 to 1.3.

UTEI Policy

Confidentiality

- While such tight confidentiality is maintained the UTEI will have some usefulness at the individual level but none at any more strategic level. One of the most common complaints from students is that adverse scores/comments they give on surveys never result in action being taken.

See evidence and findings 2.1 to 2.3.

UTEI Data Collection

Collection

- Improve accuracy of the data.
- Inform students about the system and how it is used

Timing

- Administer them at times convenient to the class...collection by negotiation.
- Inform students about the system and how it is used.

Flexibility

- Developing a process for external students/off-shore students.
- Developing a different form for practicum units.
- Provide for units that do not adhere to the standard university model of teaching.
- Capturing missing data (checking all forms are accurately completed at time they are done).

Frequency

- Reduce the frequency of them.
- Doing it every second time the unit is taught.

Reliability and validity

- Reliability needs to be tested.
- Validity needs to be tested.

See evidence and findings 3.1 to 3.6.

UTEI Data

Qualitative

- Allow more open ended questions. These are the ones that really give us useful information.
- Greater emphasis on qualitative data.

See evidence and findings 4.1 to 4.3.

Access and Dissemination of UTEI Reports

Reports

- Access by ALL relevant parties (some sessionals are reliant on full time staff and have not received info).
- Dissemination processes need to be timely, meaningful, supportive in terms of PD and linked to performance management.
- Ensuring timely delivery of result to HOS and Unit Coordinators (both the summary and the qualitative comments).
- Graphical representation of results.

See evidence and findings 5.1 to 5.4.

Use of UTEI Data

Results

- Use it in conjunction with other data/information in making judgements.

Philosophical/Ethical

- Students are not aware of its use and are not giving informed consent for its use in allocating funding/promotions
- Are we just teaching to get higher outcomes...how about the intangibles.

General

- Convince staff this is a fair, reasonable and trustworthy activity.
- Convince students this is an important and worthwhile activity.
- Some units may be "unpopular" because they challenge students, but these same units may be vital in the educative process. It is not until some time after that students have completed the unit (and beyond the time anyone collects feedback regarding its effectiveness or relevance) that students realise the benefit of units such as these.

See evidence and findings 6.1 to 6.2.

Thus there are staff concerns with all six aspects of the UTEI system that need to be addressed in parallel.

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